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ANNUAL HISTORY
UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE (U)
1 JULY 1958-30 JUNE 1959

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CHAPTER 2

USAREUR's Role in International Crises

7. The New Berlin Crisis

a. The Political Buildup. During the second half of 1958 the Russians took actions designed to achieve their objectives in Berlin and in Western Europe as a whole. These actions included repeated attempts by the East German regime to establish a legal basis for challenging the occupation of Berlin by the Western Allies; increased harassment of land, water, and air access routes to the city, with the immediate goal of forcing the Western Powers to recognize the German Democratic Republic (GDR); and a series of declarations made by government and other officials. 4

Among the latter declarations was a statement by the Soviet Berlin Commandant on 13 September 1958, according to which the Russians considered the GDR as competent to deal with the Western Allies on all matters affecting Berlin and East Germany. 4

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c. Rising Pressure. Walter Ulbricht, speaking for the East German Socialist Unity (Communist) Party in Berlin on 29 October 1958, stated that Berlin was an East German city and questioned the legality of the presence of Allied forces in Berlin. According to him, their presence in the city contradicted international law which had been agreed to by the Four Powers. He added that the agreements under which East Germany had assumed sovereignty from the U.S.S.R. included the entire territory of Berlin.⁴

In response to the rising pressure on West Berlin, General Hodges directed the U.S. Commander, Berlin, to perform such duties as the Chief of the U.S. Mission in Berlin might require in the event of an emergency involving the security of the U.S. forces. Further, he was to take such measures as were considered essential to safeguard the security of the

²USAREUR EP 103 (U), 3 Oct 58. AEAGC-PL 250/18 GC. TS.

³Ibid. TS.

⁴The New York Times (Intl. ed.), 29 Nov 58. UNCLAS.

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U.S. forces. Further, he was to take such measures as were considered essential to safeguard the security of the American troops in the U.S. sector of Berlin and within that sector to act as the deputy of CINCUSAREUR.⁵

On 10 November 1958 Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev told a Polish-Russian meeting in Moscow's Lenin Stadium: "The time has come for the powers which signed the Potsdam Agreement to give up the remnants of the occupation regime in Berlin and thus make it possible to create a normal atmosphere in the capital of the German Democratic Republic." He announced that the U.S.S.R. would hand over to the East German government those functions in Berlin that were still with Soviet organs. He charged that the Western Powers had violated the 1945 Potsdam Agreement on all points except the Four-Power status of Berlin; he also accused the West of using Berlin to carry on subversive activities against the U.S.S.R. and other Warsaw Pact countries. He added, "... and on top of everything, they enjoy the right of unhindered communication between West Berlin and West Germany by air, rail, highway, and waterways of the German Democratic Republic. ... they have long ago abolished that legal basis on which their stay in Berlin is rested."⁶

On 11 November 1958 the U.S. Ambassador in Bonn named the U.S. Commander, Berlin, as his personal representative in Berlin and authorized him to act in his behalf.⁷

Soviet harassment continued during the month of November, particularly through the halting of U.S. vehicles on their way to Berlin.⁸

d. The Crisis. The culmination of the harassment came on 27 November 1958, when the Soviet Government declared as invalid and abrogated all protocols and agreements entered into by the U.S.S.R. with respect to Berlin. The Soviet Union had resolved to abolish the occupation regime in Berlin. All official contacts between the Soviet and Allied military and governmental officials associated with the occupation status of Berlin were to cease. Berlin was to be demilitarized and declared a "free city."⁹

⁵Ltr, Gen Hodges to US Comdr Berlin, 7 Nov 58, subj: Letter of Instructions. AEAAG-X. SECRET.

⁶The Stars and Stripes (Eur. ed.), 11 Nov 58. UNCLAS.

⁷DF, USAREUR Polit Ad to CofS, 14 Nov 58, subj: Letter of Authority from Ambassador Bruce to USCOB. AEAPO. CONF.

⁸The Stars and Stripes (Eur. ed.), 16 Nov 58. UNCLAS.

⁹Cable 320, US Man Berlin to State Dept, 12 Nov 58. USAREUR SMC IN 2725. SECRET.

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Accordingly, the Soviet military forces were to be removed from East Berlin. The Western Powers were to negotiate directly with the GDR on the withdrawal of their garrisons from West Berlin, with the Soviet Union offering its good offices in these negotiations. If no agreement to that end was achieved by 27 May 1959, the Soviet Union would carry out its plans by unilateral agreement with the GDR.¹⁰

These Soviet declarations raised two sharp issues. The first involved Western access to Berlin guaranteed by a series of Four-Power agreements. Control of the routes by the East German regime, which the Western Powers did not recognize, held the threat of a new Berlin blockade. The second, and larger, issue concerned the Western commitments on Berlin and the responsibility to achieve German unification with Berlin as the capital. The Soviet proposals to transfer occupation authority to the GDR represented a unilateral abrogation of those responsibilities, with unforeseeable consequences to the United States' position in Western Europe and to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.¹¹

e. American Reaction. The Allies had no alternative but to take the position that they would maintain their garrisons in Berlin. If they agreed to deal with the GDR, they would be unable to do so. Even a de facto recognition of the GDR by the Western Allies would seriously undermine the existing basis for Allied occupation of Berlin. Furthermore, de facto recognition would give the Communists an increased stranglehold on the access routes to Berlin and thus place them in a better position to force eventual Allied de jure recognition of the German Democratic Republic.

In preparation for difficulties that might arise because of the Soviet threat to turn the Autobahn and railway check points over to the GDR, on 29 November the U.S. Commander, Berlin, instructed military convoy and rail commanders on the actions to be taken if GDR representatives interfered at border check points. In essence, U.S. military and privately owned vehicle operators as well as military train commanders were to refuse to accept GDR documentation of travel authorizations as a prerequisite to entry into the East Zone of Germany. If this policy led to a self-imposed blockade of the ground access routes to Berlin on the part of the United States, a determination of the method to be employed to reopen those access routes would be made by the United States Government.¹³

¹⁰ The New York Times (Intl ed.), 29 Nov 58. UNCLAS.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² (1) Cable 320, cited above. SECRET. (2) The New York Times (Intl 29 Nov 58. UNCLAS. (3) Cable 1160, US Emb Bonn to Sec State, 2 Dec 58. USAREUR SMC IN 586. SECRET.

¹³ (1) Cable COB-158, US Comdr Berlin to CINCUSAREUR, 29 Nov 58. (2) Cable SX-7967, CINCUSAREUR to US CINCEUR, 29 Nov 58. USAREUR SMC IN 6980. Both SECRET.

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f. Allied Counteraction. On 16 December 1958 the United States, the United Kingdom, and France reaffirmed that they would keep their garrisons in West Berlin, that they would uphold their right to free access to the city, and that they would not permit East Germany to control their movements into Berlin.

On the following day the North Atlantic Council declared that no state had the right to withdraw unilaterally from its international engagements. The Soviet denunciation of the inter-Allied agreements on Berlin could in no way deprive the other parties of their rights or relieve the Soviet Union of its obligations. The council fully associated itself with the views expressed on the subject by the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Federal Republic of Germany in their statement rejecting the Soviet proposal. The demands expressed by the Soviet Government had created a serious situation that would have to be faced with determination. Each member state had assumed responsibilities in regard to the security and welfare of Berlin and the maintenance of the Western position in that city. The member states of NATO could not approve a solution of the Berlin question that jeopardized the right of the three Western Powers to remain in Berlin as long as their responsibilities required it and that did not assure freedom of communications between that city and the free world. The Soviet Union would be responsible for any action that had the effect of hampering or endangering this freedom. The 2.2 million inhabitants of West Berlin had just reaffirmed, in a free vote, their overwhelming approval and support for that position.

The Berlin question could be settled only in the framework of an agreement with the U.S.S.R. on Germany as a whole. The Western Powers had repeatedly declared themselves ready to examine this question as well as those of European security and disarmament. They were still ready to discuss all of these problems.¹⁴

Before the end of 1958 the Soviet Union indicated that its 6-month limit for the negotiation of a new status was not rigid. At the same time the United States asserted that former agreements remained in full force and that the Soviet "attempts to undermine the rights of the United States to be in Berlin and to have access thereto were in violation of international agreements."¹⁵

g. USAREUR Actions in Early 1959. On 10 January 1959 USAREUR discontinued the practice of issuing temporary license plates for the express purpose of permitting persons whose private vehicles were not normally registered by USAREUR to travel to and from Berlin.¹⁶

¹⁴ USAREUR Inf Bul 4, Vol. 14, 3 Feb 59, "The Berlin Story." UNCLAS.

¹⁵ (1) The Washington Post, 1 Jan 59. UNCLAS. (2) The New York Herald Tribune, 1 Jan 59. UNCLAS.

¹⁶ DF, USAREUR AG to Cofs, 16 Jan 59, subj: Clearance for Autobahn to Travel to Berlin. AEAAG-AP 265/HI 36. CONF.

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Early in February the question of patrolling the Autobahn and maintaining armed guards on the trains was under consideration. The U.S. position was that since the agreement guaranteeing access to Berlin was made by the Soviets they had the responsibility for the security of these communications routes. Therefore, the United States reserved the right to patrol the Autobahn and to maintain armed guards on the trains in the event that the Soviets were not present to maintain security. These actions were not to be considered of a warlike nature but, rather, a normal precautionary measure to be taken by any military force in a country with which no peace treaty had been concluded.¹⁷

Shortly thereafter military police escorts for convoys were initiated. As a result of incidents that had previously occurred, all vehicles carried two drivers and emergency rations and equipment. Transportation and communication traffic increased correspondingly through the remainder of the fiscal year. In addition, the American facilities in the Helmstedt area were expanded and reinforced.¹⁸

During this same month Annex A to USAFEUR EP 113 was published. This new annex provided for the air evacuation of certain specified noncombatants, particularly non-U.S. personnel. It prescribed the method of handling these individuals, but did not specify who they were to be. This selection was to be made by U.S. intelligence personnel.¹⁹

During March 1959 plans were prepared for the activation of a special operations center at USAFEUR headquarters in case the Berlin situation necessitated such action. The typical incident that would cause the activation of this operations center would be if the Russians refused to pass a U.S. military convoy over the Berlin-Helmstedt Autobahn.²⁰

The day after General Edileman assumed command of USAFEUR he amplified the instructions that had previously been given to the U.S. Commander, Berlin. The latter's authority to take the actions he considered essential to safeguard the security of the U.S. troops was reiterated. In addition he was to insure the protection, security, and immunities of U.S. and Allied occupation authorities, their dependents, their employees, and their representatives in the U.S. Sector of Berlin. He was to prepare U.S. plans for the defense of Berlin in the event of an armed attack and coordinate these plans with those

¹⁷ Ltr, Maj Gen F. J. Brown, USAFEUR CofS, to Maj Gen B. Hamlett, US Comdr, Berlin, 7 Feb 59. SECRET. In USAFEUR SCS 250 Berlin.

¹⁸ Intvw, Capt J. L. Begley, USAFEUR G3 Hist Sec, with Lt Col A. L. Jones (USMC), USAFEUR G3 Opn Br, 21 Aug 59. CONF.

¹⁹ Annex A to USAFEUR EP 113, 2 Feb 59. SECRET. Special handling required; not releasable to foreign nationals.

²⁰ (1) Cable SX-2146, USAFEUR to Berlin Comd, 28 Feb 59. (2) DF, USAFEUR CofS to distr, 2 Mar 59, subj: USAFEUR Operations Center. Both CONF.

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of other Allied occupying powers. He was also to be responsible for the documentation and control of U.S. military trains, vehicles, and convoys between Helmstedt and Berlin in accordance with tripartite agreements. Finally, he was to prepare emergency plans pertaining to U.S. unilateral actions as directed.²¹

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On 1 April Task Force 11--the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment plus attachments--was dispatched, less one battalion, to the Bergen-Hohne training area in the NORTHAG sector, where it stayed until 16 May for the announced intention of "training." On this date the task force returned to its home station leaving one battalion plus the 619th and 541st Engineer Companies at Bergen-Hohne until 31 May. This task force was designated to perform all of the courses of action that the United States planned to take under EP 103 should the access routes to Berlin be cut, with the exception of Course D, which called for a division-size unit. The task force was also to constitute the U.S. contribution to a tripartite force designed to test Russian intentions or to reopen the access routes to Berlin.

The second movement began on 30 April when 1 of 3 selected NORTHAG battalions was deployed to the NORTHAG area. The announced intention of having these atomic delivery units rotate every two weeks in the NORTHAG area during this critical period was for "training" purposes.

The troop movements executed during this tense period served the dual purpose of placing combat units in favorable locations in the event of an emergency and of enabling the Soviet Military Liaison Mission to become cognizant of this fact.²³

²² USAREUR EP 103, 29 May 59. TS.

²³ (1) DF, G3 to CINCSAREUR, n.d. [Apr 59], subj: USAREUR Requirements in NORTHAG (U). ABAGO-PL 250/17. (2) Intrw, Capt Begley with Col W. B. Richardson, G3 Exec Off, 7 Dec 59. (3) Cable SX-5440, 22 Apr 59, USAREUR to Seventh Army. All TS. (4) Cable SX-3557, 27 Apr 59, USAREUR to Seventh Army. CONF. (5) Cable SX-5900, 13 May 59, USAREUR to Seventh Army. SECRET. (6) Cable SX-2290, USAREUR to Seventh Army, 5 Mar 59. TS.

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